

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Preschool Progress in Other States (Two referenced publications under separate cover)

Applicable Statute or Regulation:

KRS 157.3175, 704 KAR 3:410, 704 KAR 3:420

History/Background:

Kentucky Preschool Program. In 1990, KRS 157.3175 established Kentucky's preschool education program to serve four-year-old children at-risk of educational failure (defined as eligible for free lunch) and three- and four-year-old children with a disability or developmental delay, regardless of income.

This historic legislation was based on a large body of research that demonstrates the benefits of high quality early childhood experiences for low-income children. Young children who experience high quality early childhood programming consistently perform better in educational attainment, employment and earnings, and citizenship. Current projections estimate that for every dollar invested in quality early childhood programs \$16 is returned - \$4 to the individual, and \$12 to society.

In the 2003-2004 school year, 20,114 eligible three- and four-year-old children participated in the Kentucky Preschool Program. An additional 14,525 children were served by Head Start (federal) and an additional 2,778 non-eligible children were enrolled on a space-available basis supplemented by other funds. The Kentucky Preschool and Head Start Programs served more than 37,000 three- and four-year-old children.

The Third-Party Evaluation of the Kentucky Preschool Program documented that children made significant progress in their overall development, social skills, and early literacy during the year they were in the Kentucky Preschool Program. The gains that participants made during their preschool experience persisted so that preschool program participants did as well as their classmates from higher income families throughout their primary school career. The Kentucky Preschool Program produced similar positive outcomes for all groups of children regardless of their race or gender.

Preschool Implementation in Other States. Over the past 15 years other state legislative bodies have learned the benefits of and the need for the funding of quality preschool programs. According to *The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook* (provided as a separate cover item), produced by the National Institute for Early Education Research, in 2002-2003, 38 states funded one or more state prekindergarten initiatives, serving a total of nearly 740,000 children. Twenty states enrolled at least 10% of their 4-year-olds in state preschool programs,

and three states served at least 10% of their three-year-olds. Most states provide targeted programs to serve economically or otherwise disadvantaged children. Twelve states do not provide a state funded pre-kindergarten program.

Georgia and Oklahoma are the only states that make pre-kindergarten universally available to children. The majority of young children in the Georgia and Oklahoma programs are served in community-based programs, funded directly by the state (GA) or funded through districts (OK). A voter mandate in Florida requires that pre-kindergarten be available to all 4-year-olds by 2005. The Florida legislature and governor are experiencing difficulties establishing a plan for implementation of a quality program that is affordable.

Program Quality. If states want to experience the child outcomes reported in the evidence-based research, states must provide high quality programs. In their document titled *Building a Foundation for Success by Getting Every Child Ready for School* (provided as a separate cover item), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) lists five elements of quality preschool programs:

- Proven curriculum and learning processes;
- High staff-to-children ratio and small class size;
- Qualified, well-compensated teachers;
- Strong health and safety standards; and
- Meaningful involvement by parents.

Curriculum and learning process: Six SREB states (Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, Texas) have established comprehensive prekindergarten standards.

Staff-to-children ratio and class size: High staff-to-children ratio and class size are essential for quality programming. Thirteen SREB states, including Kentucky, follow the recommendations for staff-to-children ratios and class size. For a class size of 20 or fewer, the staff-to-child ratio is 1 to 10.

Teacher credentials: Qualified, well compensated teachers are necessary to ensure success of participating children in the program. Eleven SREB states require the lead teacher to have a bachelor's degree. Kentucky meets the teacher credentials for lead teachers (certification); however, preschool teachers are not required to hold a child development associate credential.

Health and safety: Healthy children will attain more educational success. Eleven SREB states (including Kentucky) provide access or referral to vision, hearing and health screening to identify health problems early.

Parental involvement: Parents are the first teachers of their young children. Meaningful parent involvement is a powerful element of effective preschool programs. Thirteen SREB states offer at least one support service to parents of preschool children. The Kentucky Preschool Program was designed to provide meaningful opportunities for parental involvement and offers four support services for families.

Adequate state funding. Providing quality preschool programs is not inexpensive. Of the SREB states providing full-day preschool programs the median per child expenditure is \$3,640/year. For the six SREB states providing part-day preschool programs, the median per child expenditure is \$2,550/year (Kentucky's 2003-2004 expenditure was \$2,227/child).

In 2005, 15 states nationwide increased their pre-kindergarten funding according to the Trust for Early Education, seven of which are SREB states (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Virginia). Four SREB states decreased funding in the wake of state revenue shortfalls (Louisiana, Maryland, South Carolina, West Virginia).

Policy Issue(s):

While Kentucky has implemented a preschool system to provide educational support to some at-risk children and their families, the evidence is clear that other at-risk children and families are exempt from the educational enrichment and could benefit greatly if provided the opportunity for participation. Two major issues that exist for Kentucky's preschool program are securing adequate funding and expanding the eligibility of services.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

The Kentucky Preschool Program Third Party Evaluation documented how the intervention of a quality preschool program narrowed the developmental gap. Expanded support for quality early childhood programs across settings, from birth-five years of age, will only provide more years to narrow the gap before children enter the K-12 system.

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